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UNCLAS CAIRO 003589

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SUBJECT: POLICE ROUND UP MUSLIM BROTHERS: EGYPTIAN MEDIA  
THEMES, MAY 4 TO 9

1. Headlines: Egyptian media devoted much of their May 6 - 7 weekend coverage to talks between President Mubarak, Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah, and Oman's Sultan Qabous at Sharm El Sheikh. The media also reported on a proposed amendment to constitutional article 76. On the latter, on May 8 opposition Al Wafd (circulation: 200,000) ran a column: "The Assassination of Egyptian Political Life." Also on May 8 pro-government Al Ahram (circulation: 750,000) printed a small headline on its front page, "A Strange Statement by Bush," reporting on President Bush's call for open presidential elections in Egypt and international monitoring. End headlines.

2. Muslim Brotherhood (MB) members hit the streets, get arrested. All major newspapers reported May 7 that 200 MB members had been arrested and 30 policemen injured in clashes during May 6 demonstrations in four provinces. According to a May 7 report on news website "Masrawy.com," a MB member in Daqahliyya province died after police fired tear gas on demonstrators. Pro-government Al Akhbar (circulation: 800,000) noted that MB members had been arrested for "resisting authority and injuring security forces." The following day, all newspapers reported that, in fact, 400 MB members had been detained, along with MB leader Essam El Erian. Erian declared, through his lawyer, that he had been arrested because of his plans to run for the presidency. Egyptians read on May 9, in pan-Arab newspapers Al Hayat and Al Sharq Al Awsat, MB Supreme Guide Mahdy Akef's statement that the MB will not stop demonstrating "until political reform is implemented." (Note: Akef also issued a vague warning about "civil disobedience," but it was not reported. (End note.)

3. April 30 terrorist attacks discussed: On May 7 independent daily Al Masri Al Youm (circulation: 20,000) reported that the government could not identify the dead body found after the April 30 bomb attack near the Egyptian Museum initially reported in the media as that of the bomber. A leading medical examiner was quoted saying that DNA tests on the dead man were "inconclusive." On May 6 Al Ahram's editor-in-chief criticized satellite channels for focusing on the terrorist attacks in Egypt. Also on May 6, a senior Al Ahram commentator wrote that the attacks revealed the flaws in Egyptian security forces' handling of terrorism and criticized the GOE's disregard for the country's lower classes. Al Akhbar reported May 6 that government interrogations of arrested terrorist suspects had revealed that the attacks' organizers had collected money publicly under the pretext of sending it to victims of war in Iraq. On May 7 another Al Ahram columnist stated that terrorists in Egypt "are nourished by mosque preaching and cassette tapes that instigate negative ways of thinking."

4. Egyptian media OK; Arab media not OK: On May 9 Egyptian Channel 2's popular program "Al Bayt Baytak" ("Make Yourself at Home") hosted Hassan Abul Ella, assistant of Minister of Information; Mustafa Bakry of the sensationalist weekly Al-Osboa (circulation: 50,000); and Dubai TV media celebrity, Mutaz Al Demerdash. Abul Ella stated that the Egyptian media serve the country better than other Arab media establishments that "aim only at attacking other countries." Mentioning Al Hurra TV in particular, Bakry claimed that satellite TV channels serve "hidden political agendas." Demerdash replied that the Arab media has to abandon its "taboos" and "love of conspiracy theories" if it wanted to improve.

GRAY